

LESKERNICK HILL

Descending homeward aloof, alone,
aching from head to blistered toe,
I am too tired to resist what this landscape insists:
that the surly certainties of time and place
could be haunted by a scatter of boulder and stone.
Surely a hardy hill however passive
can hardly transcend into the uncanny
- it just cannot - or can it?
Could the rain-filled clouds be the ghosts of granite?
Both make the ascended silence massive.
How I admire the rewards of this gaunt solitude
that you must drift in like evaporating mist;
how they cluster in the stone circle of a ruined house
facing each other and talking through lunch
secure in the primary colours of their survival clothing
that stab and clash and flash across the landscape.
I survive by withstanding the willed madness for the fabulous
in a kingdom of stone: this is a religion where
you feel far more than alone.
They hack and batter and clatter their way through the day
fortified by the camaraderie and bad jokes of avoidance;
their fortress will keep it out, out there, not *here*, in the nothingness,
where it matters, where it adheres
to the inner void of matter with refreshing emptiness.
When the cover of my rucksack blew away in the gale
somewhere between Westmoorgate and the tool shed,
I loathed the thought that a plastic insult of the present
was disfiguring the grand status of this battered everywhere.
Common sense bated me, insisted I should not bother searching;
instead I did not bother trying
but wandered in a confident straight line wherever
and walked right up to where it was presented to me waiting.
A week later I lost a plastic bag in the wind.
Because I did not need it I hardly even tried to retrieve it.
An hour later my fair-weather spirituality
received a deserved slap:
I watched in slow motion
as my hand was crushed
between two decisive slabs of granite;
I made the inevitable improper connection
while common sense howled its derision
at wisdom in such superstition.
Today the boulders mediate their complex greys
like minor gods ordering chaos,
the darker darkness of objective facts
banished to the dross of their leeward shadows.
Tired stones flung from heaven, mired in cowpats and dung,

wallow in their shallow impact with our reality,
exacerbating the tragic groundbass of mortality.
How I adore their blunt clumsiness
as they shunt each other downslope
like frozen explosions of fossil-grey surf.
De-turfed by archaeologists,
secrets extroverted by an introvert professor
whose wrapped stones and fluorescent flags
knell the expressions of a magic culture
that reason has harmed,
they are sentinels of impersonal charm
invincible in their impenetrable solitude,
the seductive charisma
of Nature's most dangerous central calm:
they know no fear of isolation,
they weep no tears of desolation,
nor show their wounds with old, cold scars.
Instead, they dwell beneath the scouring seasons
uniting the past and the present in the resonant magnitude
of a tense unknown
of living and dead, of harvest and sown, of near and far.
And I confess from my own shadows
that when the white light emboldens
the windward façade of a boulder
haloed in yellow lichen,
something intensely tiny but far more mighty
than the farthest mountain instantly happens -
the scene is hallowed.
For mica far more than merely brightens
- it ignites into stars -
that liken to the light far brighter than bright.

Jeremy Stafford-Deitsch.